

The Mysteries of HARRIS BURDICK

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

In 1984, I wrote the following as an introduction to *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*.

I first saw the drawings in this book a year ago, in the home of a man named Peter Wenders. Though Mr. Wenders is retired now, he once worked for a children's book publisher, choosing the stories and pictures that would be turned into books.

Thirty years ago a man called at Peter Wenders's office, introducing himself as Harris Burdick. Mr. Burdick explained that he had written fourteen stories and had drawn many pictures for each one. He'd brought with him just one drawing from each story, to see if Wenders liked his work.

Peter Wenders was fascinated by the drawings. He told Burdick he would like to read the stories that went with them as soon as possible. The artist agreed to bring the stories the next morning. He left the fourteen drawings with Wenders. But he did not return the next day. Or the day after that. Harris Burdick was never heard from again. Over the years, Wenders tried to find out who Burdick was and what had happened to him, but he discovered nothing. To this day Harris Burdick remains a complete mystery.

His disappearance is not the only mystery left behind. What were the stories that went with these drawings? There are some clues. Burdick had written a title and caption for each picture. When I told Peter Wenders how difficult it was to look at the drawings and their captions without imagining a story, he smiled and left the room. He returned with a dust-covered cardboard box. Inside were dozens of stories, all inspired by the Burdick drawings. They'd been written years ago by Wenders's children and their friends.

I spent the rest of my visit reading these stories. They were remarkable, some bizarre, some funny, some downright scary. In the hope that other children will be inspired by them, the Burdick drawings are reproduced here for the first time.

Over the past twelve years I have received hundreds of Burdick stories written by children and adults. These efforts show that the words and pictures of Mr. Burdick are indeed inspirational. Classroom teachers and aspiring writers have expressed their desire for larger reproductions of Mr. Burdick's pictures. To that end, this portfolio has been produced. There is, however, another reason for this edition.

Peter Wenders and I were certain that the

publication of *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* would lead to the discovery of information about Mr. Burdick. Ten years passed without a single clue surfacing. Then, in 1994, I received a letter from a Mr. Daniel Hirsch of North Carolina. He described himself as a dealer in antique books and shared with me the following story.

In 1963 he learned of a collection of books being offered for sale in Bangor, Maine. These books were located in the library of a grand but rundown Victorian home. Mr. Hirsch remembers learning that the owner of the house, an elderly woman, had died recently, leaving the house and its contents to the local Animal Rescue League.

Impressed with the collection he found, Mr. Hirsch purchased the entire library. This included a large mirror whose wooden frame was decorated with carved portraits of characters from *Through The Looking Glass*.

Two years ago, this mirror, still in the possession of Mr. Hirsch, fell from the wall of his bookshop and cracked. Removing the shards of glass, Mr. Hirsch made a remarkable discovery. Neatly concealed between the mirror and its wooden back was the drawing of the "Young Magician" that is reproduced here.

This drawing is identical in size and technique to Burdick's other pictures. Like those, it is unsigned and has a title and caption written in the margin at the bottom. The title on

this piece identifies it as another picture from the story "Missing in Venice." I have no doubts regarding its authenticity.

Unfortunately, Mr. Hirsch, who has an uncanny memory for the names and locations of the books in his shop, cannot remember the details of his trip to Bangor in 1963. In fact, he is no longer certain the old Victorian house was in Bangor. However, he is certain he still owns one of the books that came from the library where he purchased the mirror.

It is a rare early edition, in the original Italian, of Collodi's *Pinocchio*. Inside the front cover is a bookplate bearing the inscription "Hazel Bartlett, Her Book." All efforts to find information about a Hazel Bartlett of Bangor have proven fruitless. Rather than solving the mystery of Harris Burdick, the discovery of the fifteenth drawing has only served to make it more perplexing.

Chris Van Allsburg
Providence, RI, December 21, 1995



Thanks to Frederick G. Hall and Anna Ray Chatman



MR. LINDEN'S LIBRARY

*He had warned her about the book.
Now it was too late.*



THE SEVEN CHAIRS

The fifth one ended up in France.



JUST DESERT

*She lowered the knife and
it grew even brighter.*



CAPTAIN TORY

*He swung his lantern
three times and slowly the schooner appeared.*



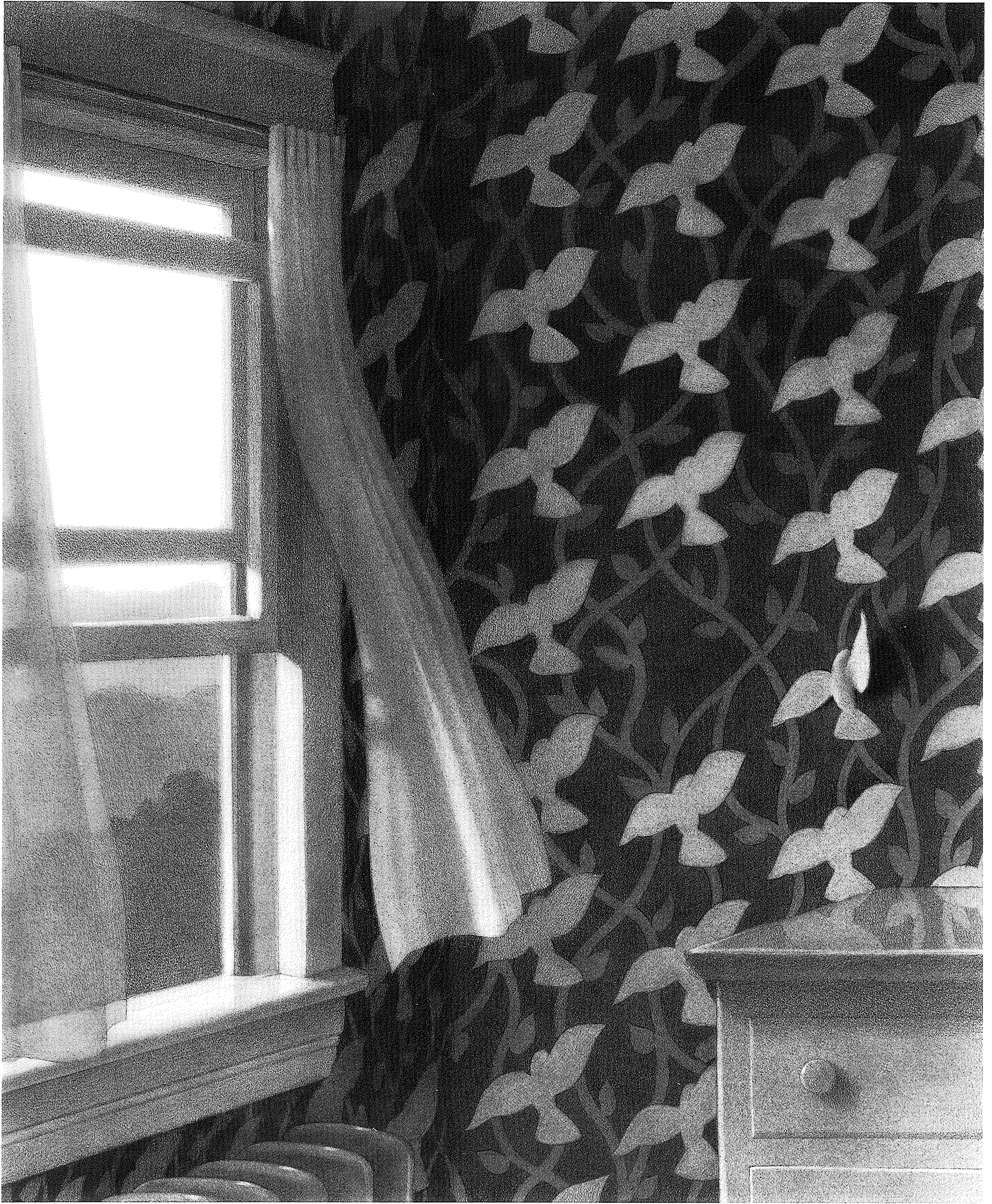
OSCAR AND ALPHONSE

*She knew it was time to send them back.
The caterpillars softly wiggled in her hand,
spelling out "goodbye."*



THE HOUSE ON MAPLE STREET

It was a perfect lift-off.



THE THIRD-FLOOR BEDROOM

*It all began when someone left
the window open.*



UNDER THE RUG

Two weeks passed and it happened again.



MISSING IN VENICE

"This time she'd gone too far."



ARCHIE SMITH, BOY WONDER

A tiny voice asked, "Is he the one?"



A STRANGE DAY IN JULY

*He threw with all his might, but the
third stone came skipping back.*



MISSING IN VENICE

*Even with her mighty engines in reverse,
the ocean liner was pulled further and
further into the canal.*



ANOTHER PLACE, ANOTHER TIME

If there was an answer, he'd find it there.



UNINVITED GUESTS

*His heart was pounding.
He was sure he had seen the doorknob turn.*



THE HARP

So it's true he thought, it's really true.